

November 14, 2005: NORTON MOURNS PASSING OF JUDGE WILLIAM BRYANT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 14, 2005 NORTON MOURNS PASSING OF JUDGE WILLIAM BRYANT AS
PRESIDENT SIGNS HER BILL NAMING ANNEX IN HIS HONOR

Washington, DC—President Bush signed a bill on Friday that Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) has pressed for two years to name the Annex of the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Building here for Senior District Court Judge William B. Bryant, a local legal pioneer with a legendary reputation, but she learned sadly this morning that Bryant passed away last night. Bryant, the first African American chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, first achieved legal distinction in post World War II Washington at a time when blacks were denied admission to the D.C. Bar and even to the use of the bar library. Norton had planned to personally visit the 94-year-old judge at the court, along with Sen. John Warner (R-VA), the Senate sponsor of the Bryant Annex measure, to celebrate the signing of the bill this week. Congresswoman Norton said, "My deep sadness at the passing of Judge Bryant will be shared by residents in every walk of life throughout the city and especially among its lawyers. My sense of loss is mitigated only by the passage of the bill before Judge Bryant's death. District residents revere Judge Bryant as a Washingtonian who spent his life overcoming racial odds to represent residents with such excellence that the bar and the legal establishment itself had to admit him. In Judge Bryant's closed, segregated Washington, a Black lawyer could not achieve what he did by the protests we are used to today. He was left on his own with only his excellent, disciplined mind, his understanding of the meaning of justice, his determination to succeed and his zeal for public service. In this city, where the federal District Court on which Judge Bryant served wields disproportionate power, residents were the direct beneficiaries of his service. The nation and the law itself, however, are equally in his debt as the William B. Bryant Annex will now attest." The first Norton Bryant bill easily passed the House last year but met roadblocks in the Senate because Bryant was still sitting, until Senator Warner, who served in the U.S. attorney's office with Judge Bryant, broke a logjam this year and succeeded in adding the Bryant amendment to a bill naming a federal building in Detroit after Rosa Parks. The House followed suit by approving the amended bill on November 2. Chief Judge Thomas Hogan of the U.S. District Court visited Norton in 2004 to ask for the designation at the request of all of the judges of his court without the knowledge of Judge Bryant.

In her statement on the House floor before final passage, Norton said of Bryant and Parks, "Both are legendary African Americans, and the agreement that federal buildings should be named in their honor is both wide and deep." Norton said that the true mark of Judge Bryant's distinction is the array of support that the Bryant bill got in the Congress, and the extraordinary unanimous request from the court on which he served to name the Annex for him. She was able to get the bill on the non-controversial suspension calendar last year once the Judge's achievements became known, and Norton said that she appreciated that the House leadership was equally generous again this year. Senator Warner and Senate Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Patrick Leahy (D-VT) "never stopped trying to get the bill through the Senate, inserting it into whatever moved," Norton said, until Senator Warner insisted on an action on the Senate floor. Transportation Committee Ranking Member Jim Oberstar (D-MN) tried to attach the naming bill during the Transportation conference this year and E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr., the son of the judge for whom the courthouse was named, spoke up about the admiration of his father for Judge Bryant and urged passage. Bryant, who remained an active District Court judge until his death, was a longtime D.C. resident and graduate of the D.C. Public Schools, whose distinguished legal career was established practicing law in segregated Washington in the 1940s and 1950s. He graduated from Howard University and Howard Law School, where he was first in his class. After graduation, Judge Bryant served as chief research assistant to Dr. Ralph Bunche when Bunche worked with Gunnar Myrdal, the famous Swedish economist, in his studies of American racial issues. Bryant established his legal reputation as a partner in the legendary African-American law firm of Houston, Bryant and Gardner and taught at Howard Law School. Judge Bryant served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was honorably discharged as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1947. As segregation relaxed, Bryant's legal reputation at the bar, including winning landmark cases, made him a natural to become the first African American Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia in 1951. Among his many notable cases is the landmark *Mallory v. United States*, 354 U.S. 449 (1957), where the Supreme Court ruled that an arrested person must be promptly brought before a judicial officer. President Lyndon Johnson later appointed Bryant to the District Court here in 1965. The Prettyman Federal Building, located at 3rd and Constitution Avenue, NW, houses the U. S. District Court and the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. , houses the U. S. District Court and the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

, houses the U. S. District Court and the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.